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ABSTRACT

Two separate historical traditions have influenced Swedish literacy: the church and formal schooling. In answer to the challenge of the International Literacy Year 1990, Sweden has formed a national committee to address such issues as future literacy missions, support of international understanding, and stimulation of research. The National Board of Education has identified the necessary levels of literacy that would apply to all pupils after 9 years of compulsory schooling. Research on literacy in compulsory schools has shown a positive picture of literacy and the importance of basic skills for future life. Research related to lifelong education, of which literacy is an inherent dimension, has focused on defining the problem of adult illiteracy, young people in upper secondary schools who have serious deficiencies in literacy skills, and adult basic education for immigrants, "new" learners, and adults with learning disabilities. A comprehensive research strategy would include studies of the acquisition of literacy, assessment of adult literacy levels, analysis of adult reading and writing disabilities, and international comparative studies. A Swedish approach to the future literacy mission would have an international flavor, focus on family literacy, include workplace education, and expand the concept of literacy to embrace all forms of communication. (11 references) (YLB)

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ADULT LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS IN SWEDEN

An Overview of Policy Issues and Research Needs

by Kenneth Abrahamsson*

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FN:s internationella läskunnighetsår 1990
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Swedish National Board of Education and
Swedish National Committee for the International Literacy Year

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1. Literacy in Sweden - a Historical Background

Contemporary life is to a large extent based on the written word. The ability to read and write is a necessity for active participation in civic life, in the world of work and of course, also in your neighborhood or within the family. New technology and an increasing use of computers call for new forms of literacy.[1]

The purpose of this paper is to give some examples of Swedish research and practice in the field of adult literacy. The content reflects literacy issues from historic to current research approaches, from young to adult learners and from readers to writers.

Sweden has a long tradition of enhancing literacy among its total population. The first major contributions were developed in the 17th and 18th centuries through the state church. This literacy mission was based on an oral tradition and aimed at promoting a better reading of the Bible and other official religious texts. Another step forward was taken by the free and independent churches during the last century. They focused not only on the citizens' capacity to read but also an individual's own choice of what to read. Public compulsory schools started in Sweden in 1842. Compulsory schooling is traditionally a major institution for promoting literacy. There are, however, important developments outside formal education.

A number of new popular movements were initiated towards the end of the last century, such as the temperance movement, the cooperative movement and the liberal movement, the farmers' movement and the labour movement. A typical feature in the building of Swedish popular movements has been the value of knowledge and active citizenship. Folk high schools (residential colleges for adults) and study circles are - in addition to libraries - the two most common tools for learning.

According to *Egil Johansson*, University of Umeå, there are two literacy traditions in the development of modern Sweden:

> *Swedish literacy must be understood as the influence of two separate historical traditions. The first: to read, sing and pray according to 'the word of God' had its roots deep in the old oral tradition of the church and its shift to the first printed ABC- or alphabet-books with the same short texts in many languages.*

The second tradition, to read, write, and consider the 'world' as a need in one's daily life, was based more upon formal schooling with its final expansion during the 19th century. The goals and implications of these literacy traditions can be studied in many ways within the historical perspective of different religious, educational, social and political forces and frames.

Which future lessons can we read from our history? Will new forms of literacy, or illiteracy, develop within the context of the new information society?

2. The Challenge of the International Literacy Year 1990

We all know that 1990 has been proclaimed to be the International Literacy Year by the United Nations. All of us agree on the fact that growing world illiteracy with almost one billion illiterates is one of the most difficult educational challenges - or threats - of our time. In a global sense, we are far away from the essence of the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, that "everyone has the right to education."

Thus, the right to education for all is still more a vision than a reality. Over 130 million children, mainly girls, have no access to primary education. Almost one billion adults, women as a silent majority, are illiterates or face severe reading and writing difficulties. More than one third of the adults have no access to printed knowledge or skills to cope with information technology. In a post-war perspective, the rate of illiteracy has declined, but a new situation occurred in the mid-eighties with a negative development in the world education systems. Many Third World countries are struggling with the challenge - universal access to primary education, while industrial and post-industrial countries have their problems located on higher levels in the educational system.

The number of young people that complete elementary school is also declining in a global perspective. School drop-outs are not, however, only a problem in the third world. The hidden rejection of certain groups of young people in the formal school system is also a growing problem in the industrialized countries. Adult illiteracy or severe reading and writing difficulties are no more consequences of lack of schooling or too few years in formal education. It is also evident that these problems are dependent on dysfunctions in modern school systems.

Sweden and the Literacy Year

Schools and adult education reach practically everybody in the country. Compulsory schooling is from 7 to 16 years of age. Nearly everyone continues on to at least two years of upper secondary schooling. More than 50% of all adults are active in some kind of organized learning (i.e study circles, folk high school courses, in-service training, municipal adult education, adult basic education, labour market training, etc.) during one single year.

Unfortunately, however, being taught is still not synonymous with having learnt. Thus, there are many challenges for schools and adult education organizers to face in making literacy and numeracy a right for all individuals. This should be an important step forward from a vision where everybody has the basic skills to develop and continue in a life-long learning enterprise.

Sweden has, as most other countries, formed a *National Committee for the International Literacy Year*. One of the crucial tasks of the Swedish ILY-committee is to analyze and discuss future literacy missions in Sweden. Special attention has been paid to efforts to enhance reading literacy and basic skills in schools. Another field of interest concerns initiatives to support international understanding - especially Third World development problems - in schools and adult education. The role of basic skills and civic knowledge in schools and adult education in a post-industrial and knowledge-intensive society forms another issue of interest.

Finally, the committee has the role of stimulating new research in fields such as the societal determinants of illiteracy, the assessment of its volume and content and useful practice in literacy teaching for young people and adults. The Swedish committee also functions as a clearinghouse for ideas and initiatives concerning the promotion of a more literate society in a broader sense. Conferences, seminars, production of information material, exhibitions and an active collaboration with other agencies are also important tasks. One initiative that can be mentioned is a book entitled "*Att läsa - en nyckel till många världar*" (Reading - A Key to Many Worlds). The book was published for the International Literacy Day, September 8, and has now been distributed to schools and adult educational organizations. A short description of the ILY-90 in Sweden has been written by the present author (*The International Literacy Year in Sweden - A Journey Through a Changing Landscape*).

3. Literacy and Compulsory Education

Active literacy is one of the central objectives in the national curriculum for Swedish compulsory schools. In this respect, literacy includes a broader dimension of communicative skills needed in a modern society. Recently, the National Board of Education presented a report "*Om grundläggande kunskaper och färdigheter i en skola för alla*" (On Basic Knowledge and Skills in a School for All), which attempts to identify the necessary levels of literacy that would apply to *all* pupils after nine years of compulsory schooling.

> "A basis for identifying basic language skills can be summed up in the following way:
>
> **Speaking-Listening**
>
> As a general rule, pupils leaving compulsory school should have enough self-assurance from a linguistic point of view that they can express themselves clearly in various communicative situations. They should have learned to listen to others but also have learned to state their own opinions. A gradually increasing linguistic competency will be reflected where a pupil -
>
> - ☐ plays an active communicative role in small group discussions,
> - ☐ has no difficultly in speaking to , relating to and performing for a peer group,
> - ☐ listens with interest to narrative accounts of friends and teachers,
> - ☐ listens - takes part in discussions, abides by "the rules of the game,"
> - ☐ narrates and relates clearly concerning own experiences and educational materials,
> - ☐ listens actively to both imaginative and factual stories,
> - ☐ takes part in group discussions; listens to others and is also able to voice an opinion and motivate it,
> - ☐ narrates and relates clearly and easily in front of a class,
> - ☐ shows a positive attitude to new information and can comment on it.

Reading

A pupil can be said to have achieved elementary skills in reading when he or she can use reading as a means of gaining knowledge and experiences and thereby have increased possibilities of influencing his or her own life situation. A basic goal in this context is also that a pupil will want to continue to read. The levels in this process are where a pupil -

- ☐ likes to listen to someone else read aloud,
- ☐ can read simple texts silently and aloud,
- ☐ can read on his or her own and react to the reading by narrating or by drawing a picture,
- ☐ can choose his or her favourite stories,
- ☐ experiences being able to read,
- ☐ likes to read children's stories and borrow books from the library,
- ☐ can read both stories and non-fiction and tell about them using his or her own words,
- ☐ can make comparisons and evaluations and draw conclusions from that which is read,
- ☐ can choose and gather information from texts for a decided purpose,
- ☐ can understand and use lists ordered alphabetically,
- ☐ can read well enough so that any lexical problems do not hamper his or her understanding and experience of the text,
- ☐ has acquired a wide range of reading habits and interests - newspapers, non-fiction, informative materials, literature,
- ☐ can modify his or her reading technique according to type of text and purpose involved.

Writing

A basic ability to write means being able to express in writing communication that can be understood by others. This entails a reasonable level of formal training (spelling, handwriting, linguistic structure) and also self-confidence in one's own ability to write. This ability increases more and more as a pupil -

- ☐ can print blocked letters,
- ☐ can write simple stories, letters, texts accompanying pictures,
- ☐ experiences bering able to write,
- ☐ has learned handwriting,
- ☐ can sound out words and write them,
- ☐ can see sentence structure and use both full-stops and capital letters,
- ☐ can write and relate stories chronologically,
- ☐ can write about past visits, excursions, etc.,
- ☐ writes reasonably well with a readable handwriting,
- ☐ can also spell most words that cannot be sounded out,
- ☐ can organize a written text so that the course of events and context can be clearly understood,
- ☐ can fill out forms and write applications,
- ☐ has a positive attitude towards written expression.

The descriptive levels above are both brief and, as previously stated, somewhat approximated. In other words, there is ample space for concretion and clarification. A group discussion will undoubtedly lead to a need for expanding and criticizing many of the points and levels expressed. This would of course rhyme well with the whole purpose of critical thinking and debate which is so important for pupils to learn in school. Discussions of this type are not only necessary within groups of teachers, but also among pupils, who in themselves represent the most important interested party and who can contribute new and perhaps overlooked perspectives concerning the development of basic knowledge."

Research on Schooling and Literacy

During the last decades many efforts have been made to arrive at a reliable picture of the level of literacy in Swedish compulsory schools. Through the standardized testing used in schools it has been possible to demonstrate that there does not exist any true illiteracy in schools. But there is a hitherto unknown number of students who leave schools with incomplete reading and writing skills, or with lack of functional literacy. These numbers are difficult to estimate primarily because of the increasing number of immigrant students. Lack of reading and writing skills in the Swedish language does not necessarily mean lack of reading and writing skills in the student's home language.

Recent national assessments on literacy and numeracy among student in grades 2 and 5 - aged 8 and 11 respectively - show a positive picture. Thus, even if the situation is better than stated, literacy and numeracy are skills that you can master better or worse. The main question should thus be restated to concern the question of a sufficient level of literacy and numeracy - sufficient for giving individuals the possibility to master basic skills in all other school subjects as well as in life outside the classroom.

Here, longitudinal research, comprising 10 percent each of five cohorts, the oldest ones being born 1948, the youngest 1977, gives ample evidence of the great importance for future life - within and outside the educational system - of basic skills.

Individuals, who when they leave school lack these basic skills, of which sufficient literacy and numeracy are the keys, will not be able to take full part in the society in which they live.

Another large effort in trying to establish reliable and valid measures of the level of literacy - in this case worldwide - is at present taking place within the IEA.

Sweden, in collaboration with 35 countries, takes part in the IEA study on Reading Literacy. This is an international research endeavour that will give each of the participating countries a rich material to work with in the context of literacy. From Swedish points of view, not only the main study but also the possibilities for a wide range of special studies, will undoubtedly furnish professionals in schools as well as politicians with material for discussions and debates.

Apart from the main study - the reading literacy level of 9- and 14-year olds in a international perspective, at least the following special studies will be carried out:

i) Immigrant students in Swedish schools - how is their level of reading literacy in Swedish?

ii) What changes - if any - have taken place regarding the level of literacy between 1970 and 1991? (The first IEA Reading Comprehension study was conducted in 1970.)

iii) The level of reading literacy in the home language among immigrant students in Swedish schools. Here there will be a unique opportunity to relate the results from these groups in Sweden with their counterparts in the home countries. Consequently, can Sweden live up to one of the main goals of immigrant policy - bilingualism?

iv) The level of reading literacy in modern languages among Swedish students.

4. Post-literacy and Lifelong Education - Ideas and Examples

Literacy is a hot issue in the Swedish school debate. There are many explanations for this. Being literate is a necessary key to a deeper understanding of cultural traditions and the history of each country. Literacy is, however, not only an issue of empowerment and active citizenship in society. It also reflects the symbolic control or domination by different interests and values. Literacy is an inherent dimension of the notion of lifelong education and learning. It is also highly relevant in all forms of post-compulsory education. Furthermore, literacy teaching comprises a variety of educational methods and teaching approaches. Thus, research on literacy and basic skills comprises a number of approaches with different subjects and disciplines. In a more general perspective, research does not solve problems, but it can help us find out how we can develop methods and practices on our road to a more literate and numerate society.

4.1 The Knowledge Gap in Sweden - Defining the Problem

In a summary of this nature, it might be expedient to pay attention to the extent and the manner in which the following questions have been treated in an international debate:

a) How many clearly defined adult illiterates are there in various industrial or post-industrial countries?

b) How large a part of the adult population in these countries has reading and writing disabilities of an evident nature?

c) How many adults lack sufficient basic skills in order to take part effectively in society as far as work, family and civic rights and responsibilities are concerned.?

A question of central importance for most post-industrial societies is that there are more or less large groups of adults with considerable reading and writing disabilities, but who are not illiterate. The norm used in this context is usually the extent of earlier schooling. The number of years a person has been in school is sometime a necessary, but not always conclusive criterium. There are many adults with a seven or eight year education who still have dyslexic difficulties.

The number of adults with an educational level of less than nine years is gradually decreasing from 65% in 1960, 18% in 1990, 10% in the year 2000 and a bare 5% in 2010. As of this date there is no empirical data in order to determine how large a proportion of this group has reading and writing disabilities. It is also difficult to determine how many of those now in upper-secondary schools, who experience a lack of communicative skills in reading, writing and speaking.

A conceptually and pedagogically more difficult problem is how many adults lack the necessary skills to assert and maintain their rights in society in a capable manner. The information society we live in today and which we will live in the future will demand basic skills far in excess of what is now the result of a completed compulsory education.

Over the last years the debate and research concerning basic skills of adults and literacy developed and achieved greater importance. Adult literacy, or rather functional adult literacy (a somewhat dubious term) is now a vital policy area in several OECD countries, and especially in the United States and Canada.

A knowledge-oriented overview based ont he theme of *functional adult literacy* is being carried out within the CERI/OECD. The study will deal with the four following problems:

a) a definition of the different facets of the problem

b) an assessment and evaluation of the scope of the problem and its various manifestations.

c) adult educational efforts for the various groups

d) basic skills, productivity and economic development

4.2 Lifeline for Lifelong Reading - A Challenge for Upper Secondary Schools

Ever since the middle of the 1980s, Swedish educational policy has had as its motto: "Upper Secondary School for All." Upper secondary school is said to be compulsory, if not in principle, at least in practice. Almost all young people continue on to further studies, both theoretical and vocational preparatory courses.

There is one group of young people who, despite having gone through nine years of elementary education, still have serious deficiencies as far as basic abilities to read and write are concerned, or who look upon themselves as being outsiders or on-lookers where upper secondary schooling is concerned. There are a number of reasons for this and it is not always a clear-cut question of a lack of knowledge. The responsibility of municipal educational authorities to follow-up pupils who have completed basic education is an important tool in pin-pointing the needs of these young people and stimulating them to carry on with their studies or to enter the job market.

In the report entitled "Lifeline for Lifelong Learning - Background Analyses Leading to a Pedagogical Programme for Municipal Follow-up Activities," (1989) Torsten Madsén and Ingegärd Sandström provide a wide overview of what can be done to stimulate young people who risk dropping out from both studies and work. Typical symptoms for groups included in their study were lack of skills, low self-esteem and school fatigue.

The authors see the most important objective of follow-up activities as being "...partly to alter the view they have of themselves and partly to change their attitude to studies and knowledge." It is both content and communicative competence which should be focussed upon, not form, grammar or rigid rules for style. Superficial perusing must be replaced by a deeper more meaningful reading.

Margareta Grogarn, a Swedish teacher and researcher, has been especially observant of those groups of people that the report "Lifeline for Lifelong Learning" has called attention to. The following excerpt from one of her articles concerns the equal rights of those with reading difficulties to culture in society.

> "In the upper secondary schools of today I unfortunately meet an increasingly larger number of pupils who could be called *half-readers*. It is often very difficult to give help to these pupils. By using the term *half-readers*, I mean individuals who in a technical sense can read well, but who often do not have the slightest idea about the content of what they have read. They *are* able to read in a superficial sense, but they *still cannot* read in a meaningful way. They often make rash attempts at guessing and

they are continually on shaky ground, because they never know if they have read correctly or not, that is to say if they *really* understood what was in the text in front of them.

A *half-reader* like this will only attain a kind of *half-comprehension*, resulting in *half-knowledge* and in the long run a feeling of *half-ability*.

Later on in life it is not this unsatisfactory ability to read, in itself, that restricts these *half-readers'* options for cultural activities. It is their poor self-confidence that is the greatest barrier. "I don't dare - My school marks show it black and white! - sign up for a course in decorative sewing or bookbinding! What if we have to read aloud! And imagine if someone asks me during a coffee break what I thought about a film with subtitles or some article in the newspaper! And what if I had to get up and speak in front of all the others! I'm not so good at Swedish..."

Grogarn's observations raise important questions as to what extent "education for all" also means "learning for all" on the long way from primary education to an upper secondary level.

4.3 Adult Education

All adults without basic skills in reading and writing are entitled to special programmes in adult basic education (ABE). Courses in Swedish for immigrants are provided all around the country. Literacy and learning is also a major issue in a number of folk high schools and study circles. Special attention is also given to adults with learning disabilities. One such example is the provision of easy reader books. The Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company has also produced a number of programmes for adults with learning barriers or weak educational tradition. Also, the role of trade unions must be mentioned concerning "new" learners. An accurate description of the ABE-programmes are presented in NBE Information 90:12. Our purpose in this context is to illuminate the problem of having reading and writing difficulties.

It is always easier to discuss the role of adult literacy or illiteracy if we take a step back and look at individual cases and teachers' experiences.

Berit Östman, adult literacy teacher from Härnösand Folk High School, Sweden, has paid special attention to adults with dyslexia in a literate society.

"When adults return to school after many years of failure, their self-confidence is, needless to say, poor. They often begin by saying: 'I'm hopeless, you won't be able to teach me anything.'

That's just the point, I think. Teachers can't teach anybody anything. Students will have to learn - learn to be active, responsible for their own learning, set up their goals, make their own assessments. That's hard work, but that's what adult education is about.

As a result, when our students stop feeling like helpless 'recipients,' they begin searching for ways to change common attitudes towards 'functional illiteracy', claiming their rights in our so-called equal society.

The *Better Reading and Writing Association*, started in Härnösand, encourages this sort of work. Students there often write, phone or visit people in authority to try to make them understand their problems and also to make them realize that indifference might well turn out to be an expensive solution to the problem in the long run. The answers they receive, often written in official jargon, are by no means an easy exercise in reading comprehension."

What measures should be taken in society in order to enhance reading literacy on a broad range? One major condition is, of course, the production of good and readable books. An interesting Swedish experience in this field is published by the Swedish National Board of Education and written by Elsie Bellander and Beata Lundström: "*How to Publish Easy Reader Books - A Model.*" The ER-books are intended for:

"...the adult reader who experiences reading difficulty of some kind. Some readers find it difficult to understand, others have through injury or illness lost their language or are too weak to read at any length. For another group of readers Swedish is a foreign language.

Many readers need an intermediary, a middleman, who can be a friend or a librarian. There is a need for someone to point out and pave the way to reading pleasure."

5. Towards a Comprehensive Research Strategy

5.1 Learning Basic Skills in Schools

The World Declaration on Education for All presents us with a broad spectrum of responsibilities. As stated before, research cannot solve problems, but research can help in finding ways to political, educational and social decisions regarding means to give every individual the prerequisites for a full life.

The compulsory school form has a special responsibility for giving children basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. But school as an institution cannot and should not decide on its own what is essential in this respect. School prepares children for life and therefore those demands placed upon it must be made taking into account all those aspects of life and learning that an individual will confront after leaving the school environment.

There must never be a limit or ceiling in the structure that school can give its pupils. On the other hand there must be a foundation or base that is so well constructed and stable that a pupil can stand firmly upon it. To be able to read and write is a skill that needs continual practice. Learning to read is the prerequisite for reading to learn.

As far as research is concerned there are a number of factors that must be observed. Literacy can be instilled in school, but it must also be developed and cultivated in school. Few areas - with the possible exception of arithmetic and mathematics - arouse such strong feeling in the academic community among researchers as that of learning to read. There are many who think they have discovered THE method and for whom continued research in that method and testimony that it is the only right and true method have become a main ambition and goal.

These controversies in the world of research and the many debates among researchers stand out in sharp contrast to the fact that one billion people in the world today can neither read nor write.

Studies concerning the acquisition of literacy - and numeracy - how an individual can learn to decipher a linguistic and numeric code, is a matter of course in the Swedish national programme for research in the field of education. Special attention has been given for several decades to individuals or groups of individuals who for various reasons have more difficulty than others in breaking these codes. In a certain sense we are dealing with comparative studies - groups with differing qualifications and prerequisites of physical, but above all, mental nature. This research is just as necessary for adults as it is for children - although

literacy in Sweden is generally at a high level does not mean that there is total literacy or that it is at a high enough level for certain groups of individuals. For many adults, the lack of functional literacy is something acquired - they have been able to read at one point, but have been "allowed to forget."

5.2 The Need to Assess Adult Literacy Levels

The concept of *basic skills* can therefore not be used exclusively in a school environment - it is equally as imperative that it be observed in working life. In the Swedish labour force there are about 850,000 individuals (of 4.5 million) who still have less formal education than nine years. In ten years there will be about half as many. The number of individuals in the labour force who do not possess the knowledge, skills and concepts that Swedish nine-year compulsory school is supposed to give is, on the other hand, not known. We know that almost one out of five immigrants taking part in basic education for adults does not have any prior education, and one out of every three has three years of schooling at the most. The number of adults with serious reading and writing disabilities is also not known, but the number of years spent in school is of little importance for this group of people. The number of adults who lack the necessary skills and knowledge in order to maintain their rights in society in a competent manner is even more difficult to ascertain.

At this point we do not have satisfactory facts and information to pinpoint the whole problem. It will have to suffice to note that reading and writing disabilities of various types and levels of difficulty are to be found in many different groups, for example:

* adults with mental disabilities
* adults with other functional disabilities
* immigrants with little or no schooling
* Swedes with deficient schooling
* young people, who, despite having attended school for eleven or twelve years, lack basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics

The need for increased knowledge is evident. It is still far from being clear how many lack the necessary knowledge and skills to prepare them for working life in the twenty-first century.

Our knowledge of what will comprise necessary basic skills for working life is also incomplete - and thereby also knowledge of the scope and direction of the educational needs that should be met among the adult population. The NBE has estimated that it is not self-

evident that a level of knowledge, on par with that taught in compulsory school today, can be used as a framework for what will be considered necessary skills and knowledge in working life of this decade and the decade to come. It is more reasonable to assume that knowledge corresponding to a level of two years in upper secondary school will be required in subjects such as Swedish, English, mathematics and social studies.

The NBE proposes to carry out a more extensive study of these questions within the framework of its research programme - if the necessary funds are allocated. The result of such a study could be used as an important policy groundwork and basis for further decisions. It would be of importance, not only within the field of adult education, but also as far as the continuing development of upper secondary schools are concerned.

For a long time basic general education together with basic vocational training have been considered a function and responsibility of society. This principle has been cited among others for justifying a curtailment of the number of courses that could be struck from the list of those offered in upper secondary school and municipal adult education - in reference to possibilities of commissioned training. The task of guaranteeing all adults basic skills at the above level is, however, of such proportions that a traditional division of responsibility between the public sector, employers and the individual may well have to be reexamined.

5.3 Questions for a Study of Adult Literacy in Sweden

Questions for discussion concerning an analysis of adult reading and writing disabilities and also basic skills. As a foundation for a Swedish study there are several questions to be discussed:

1. Should a survey be carried out of the population as a whole or should it relate to various sub-groups?

2. What knowledge and skills should be prioritized? Should special attention be paid to reading, writing, speaking or mathematic skills? What should be used as a norm in the analysis? Should a minimum level of knowledge be related to a certain level of education achieved in compulsory school, i.e. the eighth grade, Or should the level be higher, i.e. completed nine-year compulsory education or even two years of studies at an upper-secondary level? Should *other* functional criteria be chosen from areas of work and day-by-day life?

3. To what extent can a self-estimation of reading proficiency be used in such an analysis. What connection is there between a level of education and ability of self-estimation as far as reading and writing are concerned?

4. Which of the above-mentioned methods is most reliable and valid seen from scientific point of view? How usable are the methods when seen in the light of what the result that can be achieved in day-by-day adult educational work? Is there a conflict between a scientifically representative and a pedagogically expedient perspective?

5. Suppose that the AKU model** is chosen as a first step in an analysis and that 2-3 questions at the most are of immediate importance. How, then, should these questions be expressed?

5.4 In Search of a Comparative Dimension

There are other forms of comparative studies that are also needed to enable us to broaden our knowledge of reading conditions for learning. The international comparative studies which have been carried out and which are in the process of being carried out can, if used in the right way, give the world a greater understanding of the varying conditions of a social, economic and structural nature that there are for both individual and society. International comparative studies of educational systems are often termed as attempts to compare the incomparable. This is true in cases where only outcomes are compared, without accounting for preconditions for learning in the different countries. What is interesting about comparative studies, especially international, is however comparisons of systems and what they can teach us about the importance of economic, geographical and structural conditions for student outcomes.

There is also a need for a more interdisciplinary agenda in order to understand the social implications and costs of illiteracy both in Third World countries and in post-industrialized societies. To what extent are self-experienced reading and writing difficulties a direct factor in social maladjustment in school, working life and in recreational activities. How can literacy, social segregation and economic development be elucidated in a wider social perspective? Can the public costs of illiteracy really be assessed? To be able to answer these questions we need a more detailed and balanced picture of the different steps in the ladder of literacy. This we need in order to acquire a better view of the dimensions and functions of the phenomenon pertaining to both individual and society a whole.

** The AKU-model relates to Swedish labour market surveys which are carried out regularly in order to describe both labour market participation and different characteristics of the labour force such as educational standards and study motivation.

6. The Future Literacy Mission - A Swedish Approach

Sweden and the World

Both today and in the future the greatest challenge of the International Literacy Year will be how we are to avoid a global learning disaster in the Third World. Active measures must be taken through international organizations such as the United Nations and UNESCO and through bilateral channels. In a Swedish context, the international work carried out by the various popular movements is an important contribution.

The World and Sweden

International affairs are an increasingly important factor in schools and adult education. Questions concerning peace, environment, survival and global justice can be illustrated in a large number of ways. It is even important to convey background knowledge and frames of reference in order to understand in a better way current and imminent social, political and religious conflicts. There are great challenges in this respect, both within the frame of adult education and even more so within popular education. An increasing number of new citizens in Sweden coming from the Third World should be a pedagogical asset in popular education.

Outside the Classroom

Basic education for adults and Swedish language training for immigrants are two important areas in the domains of literacy. Many important contributions are, however, needed outside classrooms, in libraries, mass media, welfare institutions and prisons. An especially significant area is within the family and the role it plays concerning reading and dialogue. More attention should be paid to *family literacy*.

Reading has deep roots in popular education and it can take on several different shapes and forms such as reading study circles, courses in creative writing or public speaking, study circles concerning various civic questions and democratic participation in decision-making or courses for people with different handicaps and adults with reading and writing disabilities.

At the Workplace

Demands for greater skills increase as the knowledge-based society continues to develop. Current studies and surveys point at the need for good basic skills and general knowledge. Representatives for labour and management stress continually the importance of personnel education and personnel development for retaining competency reserves in Sweden.

On-the-site projects aimed at strengthening basic skills at the workplace provide good examples of how to implement and carry out the goals of literacy.

Culture and Media

Oral traditions have become overshadowed by the extensive amount of written material in all facets of society. Are we again at a new crossroads where the written word will become engulfed by storms of sounds and pictures created in a mass media-oriented society? Irrespective of the mold and cast of public dialogue and apart from which new media take shape, the ability to read with insight and understanding is an increasingly vital goal for adult education. The concept of literacy must therefore be expanded to include the ability of a citizen to take part in, analyze and be well-acquainted with all forms of communication in society.

Changing Times - Changing Literacy

The examples shown in this text outline the broad range of issues with relevance to global and national literacy missions. It also raises a lot of questions. Do we need more research and knowledge or is it now time for action? The answer cannot be a simple yes or no. We of course need a great amount of engagement in the global perspective in order to combat the worldwide literacy gap. The problems are so complex, however, that we are far away from "the whole truth and nothing but the truth.." regarding literacy and society.

Are we moving from the era of *oral literacy* to the parenthesis of *reading literacy* and on to the new age of *pictorial literacy*? Will the computerization of our communicative patterns lead to a degeneration of our personal memory capacity? And will our expanding and speeded-up "sound and image-culture" allow no space for our imagination and dreams? So far, there might be more questions than answers and much more of an open space for a global dialogue in a world full of words.

[1] This paper is to a large extent based on the report Reading - A Key to Many Worlds (in Swedish only). I am grateful to Dr. Inger Marklund, Research Director, NBE, for providing background material on reading literacy in youth education as well as on the IEA-study.

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